

INTERVIEWING EFFECTIVELY

The purpose of an interview is to express your knowledge and qualifications to an employer while assessing if an organization is the right place for you to accept a position. Interviews may vary in length and in format. Regardless of the interviewer's style, keep in mind that you want to present yourself and your accomplishments in the best possible light. During the interview listen carefully to what the interviewer is saying so that you can follow up with questions. Do not assume there are single right answers to interview questions. It is often more important how you answer the question than the exact content of your responses. Your attitude during the interview is also extremely important. Go into an interview relaxed, but professional with a positive attitude. Never be defensive, arrogant, or self-effacing. You need to convey a sense of confidence and determination. Most questions will be "open-ended" requiring much more than a one word response.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- **Research the organization.** Familiarize yourself with the employer as much as possible. Read websites, annual reports, recent publications, and newspapers to find out about the field in general and the company in particular. Sign up for news alerts by visiting <http://alerts.google.com> to create keyword news alerts for the company and general industry. This will enable you not only to ask intelligent questions, but also to demonstrate to the potential employer that you are someone who does his or her homework and is genuinely interested in the position. Think of several questions to ask about the organization and the position based on your research.
- **Review your resume.** Be cognizant of your accomplishments and be able to cite examples of each. Expect a potential employer to ask you questions about work experiences, education, and activities and to ask you to elaborate on your experiences. Also know yourself, your strengths, your weaknesses, and your career goals. Be able to walk the interviewer through your resume and explain what you did at each position and how you developed skills that will help you to succeed in the position for which you are interviewing.
- **Practice your "personal pitch".** Often the first question asked by employers is "tell me about yourself" and your answer should be a 30-second to 2-minute pitch briefly describing your background, qualifications, and why you are interested in the job. You can think of your pitch much like a cover letter, but out loud, touching on the most relevant aspects of your background that qualify you for the position. You do not need to discuss your childhood or personal details of your life, but rather discuss some key experiences you've had, the skills gained from those experiences, and how they relate to the job for which you are interviewing.
- **Practice, practice, practice.** State your answers to typical interview questions out loud with a career counselor, peer, friend, or colleague. Schedule a mock interview with the Career Development Center, and use InterviewStream (<http://yeshiva.interviewstream.com>), which allows you to practice from your own computer.

THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

- **Know where to go.** Always know where you are going (location of office). Write down the name, address, and phone number of the person with whom you will have the interview and bring it with you.
- **Dress professionally.** An interviewer will decide whether or not he/she likes your appearance well before he/she will assess your abilities or personality. Conservative suits, shirts, and ties, as well as polished shoes, natural stockings, solid socks, clean nails, conservative make-up, and simple jewelry are appropriate. If you are not sure what to wear on an interview, please ask one of the staff members of the Career Development Center.
- **Go early.** Arrive 15 minutes early to allow yourself time to collect your thoughts and fill out any forms that may be necessary.

- **Bring resumes.** Bring extra copies of your resume printed on white or cream resume paper. It's helpful to bring the names, addresses, and phone numbers of three references on matching paper as well.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- **Keep the position in mind.** Remember what it takes to be successful in the job and structure your answers so that you will be highlighting relevant character traits.
- **Focus on the positive.** Always remember to be positive and enthusiastic. Do not mention anything negative about yourself, your experiences, or any former colleagues or supervisors.
- **Sell yourself!!!** You need to demonstrate to the interviewer why you are the best person for the position and why they should choose you over someone else.
- **Be specific.** Give details and examples. General responses don't help you prove your case to the interviewer.
- **Never broach questions of salary, benefits, Shabbat, or holidays until you have been offered the job.** You want to convey to the employer that you are sincerely interested in the job itself.
- **Make a positive last impression.** Thank the interviewer, shake hands, and try to find out what the next step in the interview process will be or when you can expect to hear from them.
- **Ask for a business card.** The card will ensure that you have the correct contact information and spelling so you can send a thank-you note.

EXAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this field?
- Why do you want to work for our company?
- Why did you select your Yeshiva?
- What led you to select your field or major of study?
- What college subjects did you like best? Least?
- How has your college experience prepared you for your career?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- What changes would you make in your college or university? Why?
- What do you consider your greatest strengths and weaknesses? (NOTE: for the weakness, choose something that is genuinely not your strong suit, but demonstrate that you are working to overcome this weakness; often selecting a skill is easier than a personality trait)
- How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
- What would someone you have worked for describe as your strengths? Areas that need improvement?
- What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
- How effectively do you balance your course load at school with any job or extracurricular activities?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
- What are your short-range and long-range goals?
- Do you have plans for continued study?
- What do you see yourself doing 5 years from now?
- How do you work under pressure?
- Describe the most challenging situation you have had to deal with and the ways you dealt with it.
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
- How would you determine or evaluate success?
- Why should I hire you?

- Are you willing to travel?
- Tell me about your responsibilities at your internships, part-time positions, and/or summer jobs?
- Describe a goal that you have set for yourself in the last year.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

In a behavioral interview, an employer is looking for a set of core competencies needed to be successful in the position. Some examples of these include teamwork, communication skills, problem solving abilities, and leadership. The premise of these types of questions is that past performance is an indicator of future performance. The key to answering these questions is first to assess what skill the employer is trying to learn about. Then select an example that best demonstrates that you have this skill. Examples may be drawn from a variety of experiences, including work, volunteer/community service, extracurricular activities, and academics.

Behavioral questions usually start with the phrase “Tell me about a time when...” or “Can you give an example of a situation where...” For example, “Tell me about a time when you worked with a team and something didn’t go as planned.”

To answer these types of questions, think critically about your experiences. One way to prepare is to think of two or three examples you can use for each of these questions. They don’t only have to be examples from your resume, but they should be recent (ideally not from high school) and you should not use the same situation more than twice in an interview. Your answers will need to involve details and descriptions so the interviewer gets a clear picture of how you handled the situation and your thought process in choosing that example.

When answering behavioral questions, try to structure your response as follows:

- 1) Provide a brief background so that the employer understands the context.
- 2) Describe the situation in enough detail so the interviewer can get a clear picture of how the situation relates to the question. Leave out unimportant or irrelevant details.
- 3) Explain what actions you took to resolve the situation. Remember you are selling yourself and your abilities so describe what you did in a positive manner and give details that will make you stand out. Only choose examples that highlight your strengths, not expose your weaknesses.
- 4) Conclude with the result. You may also explain what you accomplished or learned from the situation.

Some typical behavioral questions ask about times when you:

- had to solve a problem
- helped a team to accomplish a goal
- worked on a team and it did not go well
- had to know something about a topic and do research
- motivated a coworker or peer to work better
- did something for a team and did not take credit for the good of the team
- organized an event or project and it did not go according to the original plan
- had to listen carefully to complete a project
- sought advice or feedback from someone
- had to deal with time constraints
- showed a great deal of initiative
- made a sacrifice for the betterment of the group
- had to rearrange priorities to meet certain goals
- helped or mentored someone
- had to give someone bad news
- encountered an especially difficult project
- dealt with an ethical dilemma
- had competing demands to fulfill and how you accomplished the results
- had to work with a difficult coworker or supervisor

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES TO ASK ON INTERVIEWS

When preparing for an interview, it is important to think of questions you can ask the interviewer about the organization and the position. Generally the interviewer will allot time at the end of the interview for you to ask questions, though you can also ask questions as they arise naturally in the course of the conversation. Make sure to use the company website to conduct research. You can also use the Vault guides for additional information (go to www.yu.edu/cdc to access Vault.com). You want to accomplish three things by asking well thought-out questions to an interviewer:

- 1) Demonstrate your preparation by showing you have done your research to learn about the company
- 2) Show that you are genuinely interested in the position and therefore want to learn more specifics
- 3) Discover important aspects of the job to see if it will be the right fit for you

The following are some examples of questions that you can ask.

- I noticed on your website that there has recently been a new initiative on _____. I'm wondering how that may affect this department or this specific role?
- Does your company offer any formalized training or continuing education for its employees?
- I recently read an article stating that this industry is facing _____. What have the reactions been by employees at your firm to this stance?
- I recently read an article in the Wall Street Journal which predicted some of the trends of this industry. What is your take on the future growth of the organization?
- Describe the work environment and organizational culture.
- What is the overall structure of the department where the position is located?
- What are your expectations for new hires?
- What will be the biggest challenge facing the person taking this position?
- What are you looking for in a colleague?
- How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
- What characteristics does a successful person have at your company?
- What are the opportunities for professional growth?
- What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?
- What makes your firm different from its competitors?
- Why do you enjoy working for your firm?
- What is your timeline for hiring for this position?

DIRECT FEEDBACK FROM EMPLOYERS

The following are some tips stemming directly from employer feedback after on-campus recruiting at Yeshiva.

- Be proactive in the conversation. Candidates tend to rely on the interviewer too much to bring up things. Remember this is your chance to show them how great you are.
- It is ok to ask questions about the volatility of the markets and how it is affecting the firm – but do not ask questions about layoffs at the firm.
- If you have had a difficult or challenging situation with a former employer (especially a competitor) DO NOT say anything negative about the employer. Find a way to tell your story, and the challenges, with an even, objective perspective.
- Make sure to maintain eye contact and don't make awkward hand motions.
- Find a way to work into the conversation your most important points and strengths, even if the recruiter has not explicitly asked.
- Try to avoid bringing up too many examples about your CAMP experience. Examples should be about work, school, or leadership activities, if possible.
- Try not to seem TOO nervous. Take a few deep breaths before the interview starts.
- Avoid saying "I would like to START my career in accounting [or any other field for which you are interviewing]..." It makes it sound like you are not interested in that industry for the long haul.
- Try to incorporate more worldly experience into the discussion (like places you have traveled outside of Israel and an understanding as to what is going on in the world from a global perspective).
- Have more than one good question to ask the employer! Show them that you've done your research, you know about the field, and you know about their company.

- Don't pass on a question - answer everything. It is ok to ask to "take a second" to collect your thoughts if you do not have an immediate answer.
- Remember that the employer is trying to judge whether or not they would put you in front of a client or be on their team. Try to bring "teamwork" and "communication" into all of your examples in one way or another.
- They are looking for someone who can think on their feet. Don't be afraid to push your comfort zone a bit. Try to speak extemporaneously (but intelligently!) and don't give "canned" answers.
- Be concise when answering questions. Do not go on and on with an answer. Take a deep breath and a second to think about it instead of rambling on.
- If you do not know something, say that you do not know it. Making something up is bad for business and being able to say you do not know it is important. However, tell them that you will gladly research it (or think about it) and get back to them. When you write your thank you note, you can include an answer to the question – doing so will show follow-up skills.